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ABSTRACT

The philosophy of Unified Education is holistic, unidisciplinary, and generalistic. The problems raised by these attributes are the attendant difficulties in collection/analysis/projection on a time/content grid; the flux of methodological ground rules; and the tentativeness of generalists to project while they are in a stage of collection and analysis. The solutions to these problems are: a humanistic ethic, a metaphorical method, and a positivistic stance. (Author)

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UNIFIED STUDIES — I:3

CONCEPTS OF UNIFIED EDUCATION (1974)

Les Humphreys
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CONCEPTS OF UNIFIED EDUCATION

As a learning model, Unified Education is not new. Most philosophers of education pay some sort of due to the "holistic" and "integrative" aims of "whole person" learning.

In practice, however, institutions of learning of all sorts - including libraries, factories and offices as well as schools-have tended to follow a traditional liberal model for education. This model emphasizes rationalization of problems and curricula into discreet units. It stresses specialization and division of learning by disciplines.

Liberal education has been the dominant mode for learning in the United States throughout the past 150 years. And it has served us well. We have produced a goodly number of architects who are philosophers...and office workers who are poets. All this while at the same time educating brain surgeons, molecular biologists and specialists in 18th century colonial social life.

However, as our society has grown more interdependent during the past fifty years, a number of problems have arisen that cannot be solved by rationalization and division. Problems like overpopulation, energy, urbanization, alienation, poverty, resource allocation - and indeed problems of soul and spirit - these cannot be solved by aggregating specialists from a variety of disciplines in "panels" or "advisory commissions". Forty specialists from ten disciplines cannot solve a multi-faceted problem unless they can transcend the boundaries of their own training. This is the function of Unified Education.

In this sense then, Unified Education is not really inter-disciplinary - or even multi-disciplinary. <u>It is uni-disciplinary.</u> It accepts as valid the concept of synergy articulated by William James: that the whole of a problem is more than the sum of its parts. To be uni-disciplinary means to have a whole new general perspective about a situation. It always transcends the specific.

"Generalists" need not be thought of as "wool gathering" utopians. It is possible to have a sense of discipline (in the narrow meaning of that word) about the "undefined". It is possible to follow orderly procedures and logical processes while dealing with open ended and diffused problems. A holistic perspective can be just as rigorous as a careful dissection.

<u>These then are the general attributes of Unified Education: a holistic perspective; a unidisciplinary methodology; and, a rigorous approach to generalization.</u>

The Scylla and Charybdis of Unified Education are fantasy and fabrication. Without solid experiential data from a wide variety of sources the unified model breaks down. It becomes either a pleasant dream world or an artificial construct. People who employ the unified approach during the next ten years should avoid these double dangers.

The structures for learning that they create should have validity in terms of the three attributes listed above.

I hesitate to suggest it, but my tentative conclusion is that a pervasive dedication to humanism is one of the most logical rudders for unified educators to employ. I am wary of this since I know the pitfalls found in a too rigid adherence to any "ism". Nevertheless, the ethics of a unified perspective should be clearly articulated if it is to have universal validity.

The central problem of developing a holistic perspective is the creation of a time/content grid. There are no "final" solutions for problems. Learning about a situation that is in process is itself a process. Whitehead's perception of process in thought must be plugged into a never ending systematic collection-analysis-projection spectrum. This spectrum is infinite. For example, a problem such as population is never static. Strategies fpr dealing with this problem must be based on a continuing process of collection of information analysis and projection of goals (note: never statements of "conclusion"). This sort of amorphous process is never "tidy".

Change is endemic. A Unified perspective simply admits its impotence to conquer flux.

The central problem of a uni-disciplinary methodology is that its ground rules are continuously changing. One holistic problem may be approached in one way, while yet another must have a vastly different set of procedures.

I believe (and again I hesitate to affirm this) that a metaphorical methodology seems to me to be the best approach to most whole learning problems. Conceptual analysis, perceptual analysis and product analysis seem wholly deficient to me as methods of approaching whole problems.

William Gordon's work with metaphors as creative change agents seems to me to be on the right track. Methodologically he approaches "solutions" through metaphorically induced flashes of insight. It is a "chicken and egg" problem whether metaphors change situations or situations change metaphors.

In any case, whatever uni-disciplinary methodology is employed, the emphasis for the problem solver should be inconoclastic and transcendent. The primary mode should always be to "get above" the problem or situation. To see it with the roving eye of the eagle rather than the stationary view of the rock. Eschewing the stable comfort of the "familiar" is the hardest task for novices who wish to practice unified learning and teaching.

Finally, the central problem in adopting a rigorous approach to generalism lies in the reluctance of generalists to posit fixed point statements while events are in flux. There is more to be done, they cry. "We cannot project at this point without more data".

There is never enough data. Aspiring to wholeness is not the same as aspiring to completeness or totality (in fact, the latter seem antithetic to wholeness). The whole is what exists at this present moment. Decisions must be made -- and projections offered -- with the same tentativeness -- and the same sureness -- that characterizes the sea gull swooping towards a suspicious shadow.

To hide from generalizations under a cloak of professional specialization is wrong. To avoid projection while further collection of data is going on is wrong. To be afraid to be tentative is wrong.

The solution to this problem seems to me to lie in a kind of "positivism" that is willing to make projections while at the same time remaining open to revisions.

In sum, the philosophy of Unified Education is holistic, uni-disciplinary and generalist. The problems raised by these attributes are the attendant difficulties in collection/analysis/projection on a time/content grid; the flux of methodological ground rules; and the tentativeness of generalists to "project" while they are in a stage of collection and analysis. The solutions to these problems that I would posit at this point are: a humanistic ethic, a metaphorical method, and a positivist stance.